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THE UNKNOWN GODDESS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

VERSE

London Sonnets
Shylock Reasons with Mr. Chesterton
Kensington Gardens

PROSE

Circular Saws

THE UNKNOWN GODDESS

BY

HUMBERT WOLFE

NEW YORK
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THE UNKNOWN GODDESS

If thou, of these the onlie true begetter,
seekest thy name, and dost not find it, think
to be unknown, and loved the more, is better
than suffer the stale ecstasies of ink.
And know, if these are ill, then mine the error,
if well, as little they reflect thy merit,
as would thy ghost, reflected in a mirror
thy living, warm, and April-tinted spirit.
But, if too kind to their desert, thou pleadest
that, if these live, thoud'st live, or with these fall,
being thyself, than thine own self thou needest
(nor couldst thou have) other memorial—
save this: that if men, reading, seek for thee,
thine uncaught beauty sighs: " Circumspice ".

Some of these poems are republished by the courtesy of the Editors of "The Spectator," "The Weekly Westminster Gazette," "The Weekly Westminster," "The Outlook," "The Queen," "The Beacon," "The Decachord," "The Saturday Review," and "Punch." Three of the titles are purloined (without objection) from the Problems Editor of the old "Weekly Westminster Gazette." Two of the poems appeared originally in Mr. W. H. Davies' "Shorter Lyrics 1900-1922" and one as a Poetry Bookshop Broadsheet. Mr. Harold Monro has given his consent to their being reprinted here.

I should add that, though some of the poems have appeared in various anthologies, and others have been broadcast from 2 L.O., the Aberdeen and Cardiff Stations, about half are new.

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THE UNKNOWN GODDESS

ILIAD

False dreams, all false,
mad heart, were yours.
The word, and nought else,
in time endures.
Not you long after,
perished and mute,
will last, but the defter
viol and lute.
Sweetly they'll trouble
the listeners
with the cold dropped pebble
of painless verse.
Not you will be offered,
but the poet's false pain.
Mad heart, you have suffered,
and loved in vain.
What joy doth Helen
or Paris have
where these lie still in
a nameless grave?
Her beauty's a wraith,
and the boy Paris
muffles in death
his mouth's cold cherries.
Aye! these are less,
that were love's summer,
than one gold phrase
of old blind Homer?
Not Helen's wonder

nor Paris stirs,
but the bright untender
hexameters.
And thus, all passion
is nothing made,
but a star to flash in
an Iliad.
Mad heart, you were wrong!
No love of yours,
but only what is sung,
when love's over, endures.

AUGUST

HERE is August again
lovely with leaves,
and the small gold grain
in the great gold sheaves.

The swift bird-shadows
of the clouds dapple
green orchard meadows,
red with apple.

In pools sun's yellow
varnish picks out
in warm, black shallow
the cold, blue trout.

That hoarse small mummer
—the dove—in the trees
mimicks all summer
(or echoes) the bees.

And when the cold scent
of oak-bark doth
allure the bent,
brown wing of the moth,

she with stars, suddenly
powdered, and strewn,
floats a white butterfly
in the white moon.

THE DREAM-CITY

On a dream-hill we'll build our city,
and we'll build gates that have two keys—
love to let in the vanquished, and pity
to close the locks that shelter these.

There will be quiet open spaces,
and shady towers sweet with bells,
and quiet folks with quiet faces,
walking among these miracles.

There'll be a London Square in Maytime
with London lilacs, whose brave light
startles with coloured lamps the daytime,
with sudden scented wings the night.

A silent Square could but a lonely
thrush on the lilacs bear to cease
his song, and no sound else—save only
the traffic of the heart at peace.

And we will have a river painted
with the dawn's wistful stratagems
of dusted gold, and night acquainted
with the long purples of the Thames.

And we will have—oh yes! the gardens
Kensington, Richmond Hill and Kew,
and Hampton, where winter scolds, and pardons
the first sweet crocus breaking through.

And where the great their greatness squander,
and while the wise their wisdom lose,
squirrels will leap, and deer will wander,
gracefully, down the avenues.

THE WATERS OF LIFE

When, hardly moving, you decorate night's hush
with the slim pencil of your grace, retrieving
the clean flat stroke of some old Grecian brush
that painted dancers fair beyond believing;

when, leaning back the harvest of your hair
under the moon with beauty as still as hers,
your body's wonder writes upon the air
the perfect cadence of consummate verse,

I think, if this upon the air be shaken,
brief as a falling blossom, it can but be
that Time records, by beauty overtaken,
in one gold instant, immortality,

and that the patterns you weave upon the night
have such swift passion, such essential heat,
that all the painter sees, the poet can write,
are but pale shadows of your dancing feet.

LOVE IS A KEEPER OF SWANS

Love is a keeper of swans!
Helen! amid what dark wherries
are you steering the silver boat,
that for all the love of Paris,
and his lips against your throat,
passed out of Troy with windless vans?

And, fairest of Italians,
where do you glimmer, Beatrice?
What light of heaven stains your wings
with gold that were all fleur de lys?
And do you hear when Dante sings?
"Love is a keeper of swans."

Love is a keeper of swans.
Have you left the barren plain,
and stormed a gold-eagle's eyrie?
Queen-swan of the eagle strain,
what mountain has you, Mary?
And is its name, as ever, still romance?

And you, bright cygnet of immortal Hans,
you need not join your sisters yet.
You have all time. Why should you hasten?
What though the lake with reeds be set,
one reed is murmuring, oh, listen!
"Love is a keeper of swans."

GETHSEMANE

THEN Christ cried in his torment, " This is so plain
the sorrow I have preached to you, and the pain,
that before I go, belovèd, I would leave
a milky lamp of love. Ah, but you'll grieve
for human love, and that was never mine,
and for the lamp of the moon, the undivine,
the amorous moon. Pale traitress! she will move
through my still heavens and empty them with her love,
till my immense desire is spread so far
that it is the space between a star and a star—
and how will you guess, tracing that luminous lover,
that the dark of my love is the light turning over?—
This is so plain. I could almost bid you choose
the love of earth, and ways that lovers use
of holding each to each. And though love's brittle,
it is their love, little enough, so little
they can fold it in the palm of their hands, so warm
it nestles in the crook of a girl's arm.
I could almost bid you choose! For it's so sharp,
the note of the Word, touched on so frail a harp,
the strings are almost broken, and you must
suffer with hearts so brief so long a lust.
I am a god for myself, what must I do,
belovèd—a god—to reach the man in you?
How shall the clouds be common with the dull
body of earth, and how with dawn the cool
element of night be one—unless they share
the touch of death—the clouds dissolved in air,
not more impalpable than the dissolvèd frame

of earth to infinite dust, and even the name
of dawn be lost in a night that wings enfold,
where heat is no longer hot nor cold is cold.
If I choose death, belovèd, at least I'll have
the little common measure of the grave—
and the wide net of my love, where your love flashes
on its way back to the sea, will strain her meshes
to the close texture of the most private wish,
when the fisherman is one thing with the fish.
Nay! then I choose, belovèd." And speaking He
woke in that moment from His agony.

LA BELLE AU BOIS DORMANT

Listen! Love is singing!

" The tall red flames, like rows of hollyhocks,
fill all the air with the faint fragrance of fire.
Blue-white the marble, save where, dreaming, rocks
his wind-stirred dyes in showers of coloured rain
the sleeping peacock, and the golden wire
of harps is plucked, and suddenly still again."

" The flames are the burning ramparts of the world.
Who can find through them to the pleachèd alley,
in whose green shell of fanlike leaves impearled
she dreams, against her scarcely-moving bosom
still holding the untarnishable lily,
the blossom of love by youth's unfading blossom? "

" An eve will come when the sun's tapestries,
old battle-flags in heaven's cathedral aisle,
grow pale, and the first star her shadow sees
in the deep pool reflected dim and far.
(A hundred years are but a little while
in that long rendezvous of shadow with star.) "

" Let the wood burn; the star outburns the wood,
and lights her shadow in the lily-pond,
the star and something starlike in his mood
have through the flame of the world the chosen drawn
unscathed into the quiet, and beyond,
where love and youth slip through the crack of dawn."

" And does the Princess wake? The silver Faun,
as a leaf drifting sideways, glimmers and goes,
calling his lovers, clear beyond the dawn,
from the dream they had to the dream he is making
with two notes on a reed, and no one knows
whether they dream, who follow, or are waking."

Listen! Love is singing!

RHYME

Rhyme,
in your clear chime
we hear
ringing, far-off and clear,
in beauty's fairy granges
at evensong the changes,
and swells
of her lost elfin-bells.

You,
glimmering through,
astir,
wander a lamplighter,
kindling that lamp and this
of long-quenched memories
with blaze
of their auto-da-fés.

Numbers
the soul remembers,
(and moved among them
when the Sons of Morning sung them)
you echo, while the dim
shadow of Seraphim
half floats
among your muted notes.

Tamer
of love's sweet grammar,
you parse,
and change, his nouns to stars,
his verbs you conjugate,
so that they vanish straight
from time,
and lift—a moonlit paradigm.

Rhyme,
by your clear chime
we climb,
clean out of space and time,
and the small earth behind us
can neither lose nor find us,
set free
in your eternity.

MY DESK

All that I ask
is a desk—
with blotting paper white
changed every night;
no litter but the good
company of cool wood;
a glass inkpot so clean
my pen can wade therein
up to her waist and not
be liable to blot—
also laid in her place
a crystal pencil-case;
and in that glassy bed—
pencils new sharpened;
nothing to vex the soul
in the neat pigeon-hole;
and finally there must
be not a speck of dust.

And I would have the wall
austerely virginal,
with nothing to intervene
(above my desk) between
the thing I try to see
and me.

There let me sit
and write at it—
content with this
slim doorway to infinities.

FUTURE

Long afterwards
(if there is any afterwards
for you, my verses)
in the beautiful, unborn
future, of which our insect-beauties pile
in seas undreamed the undreamed coral-isle,
if anyone should read what I have written
would he not ask
–that sweet familiar stranger–
seeing the shadow of an unrisen sun
cast on my halting spirit:
" How did he plumb—this blind—
the shape of light—how guess
–this cripple–at an uncrippled loveliness? "

He will look out
over a city as simple as a thought,
where stone and brick are liquid syllables,
and the clear towers final as a phrase—
a town with the inevitable ease
of golden unobstructed sentences—
Suppose that it is evening and none moves
along those visionary streets—He reads
how long long since this beauty was desired,
how long long since the quiet in his keeping,
and long long since, when nothing was quiet or fair,
how we who thus desired did not despair.

Then while he reads maybe the thought will stir
that we are the pregnant dust
(we and all others who thus desired)
of which this lotus-flower
through untold centuries was fashioned,
and he himself our child,
to whom our vision-kings,
following the star,
bring from how dim an East
this natal myrrh, this incense from the past.

GREEN CANDLES

"THERE's someone at the door," said gold candlestick.
"Let her in quick, let her in quick!"
"And little fingers faltering at the handle.
Why don't you turn it?" asked green candle.

"Don't go, don't go," said the Hepplewhite chair,
"lest you find a strange lady there!"
"Yes! stay where you are," whispered the white wall,
"there is nobody there at all."

"I know her little foot," grey carpet said,
"Who but I should know her light tread?"
"She shall come in," answered the open door,
"and not," said the room, "go out any more."

DENMARK

I LEFT Warnemünde and Germany with a sense of little ease,
because of the trees in Germany, because of the wounded trees
that muttered together sullenly in a dark conspiring crowd,
and when the wind went among them sullenly cried aloud—
But the small first tree of Denmark was a verse (I knew) that had strayed,
a little apart from the others, out of a serenade,
where the slim pink stems were only a note, and the easy stir
of the wind in the needles only the dark musicianer,
and out of the carriage window I suddenly saw (I swear!)
how over the lower branches of my fir-tree there leaped a hare.

I had crossed over to Denmark with the most exalted plans
of writing a Danish epic—why did you slip in, Hans,
with your hare, and your little fir-tree, and your dead-red sand, and then
with all the loves of my childhood and my dreams, Hans Andersen!
It was an Epic poet that carelessly offered ten mark
to a discontented porter, as he stepped on the shores of Denmark;

—why did you take him, and change him (confess the whole business and own up!)
into the ghost of his boyhood, who had meant to be far more than grown up!
Ah, well! I surrendered at random, and made no attempt to be too coy
to be caught, and be held, and be dazzled by the old enchanter—Luke-oie.
O little fir-tree of Denmark, I passed you by, but I guessed
what star of an unborn Christmas waited against your breast—
somewhere the glass-balls are waiting, and the unlit candles glisten
somewhere, and somewhere the children unborn are singing! oh, listen!
And though, when your Christmas is over, you must lie despoiled in the garden,
yet there is nothing to rail at, fir-tree, nothing to pardon.
For, while you lie there (it is written) playing his little drum
down through the pipe of the wash-house the lead soldier will come—
Yes, and the darning-needle will boast to the old street-lamp
that she alone is a lady, but the soldier an idle scamp.
All this as the train swept onwards I dreamed, I saw, I heard,
till out of the deep of the forest, as the night came down, a bird,
an unseen bird in the forest sang, like the light of a star
clean through the stems of the fir-trees where no twigs or branches are,
of the great lord in the castle, who only answered "P"
(which, as you know, means nothing) to folk like you and me,

of the little kitchen-maiden, who, though she had scrubbed
the floor,
was a better judge of music than a Chinese Emperor.
He sang, as he has been singing this thousand years, again
the tale of the fir, and the water, and the quiet heart
of the Dane,
the fir, and the glass-cool water, and the night-sun-
haunted sky,
and how we come with the morning, and how with the
night we die.

I have seen great Kronborg standing in the red king's
robes he wore
when Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was a prince at
Helsingor—
I have seen Fredensborg whiter than the pale white hand
of a queen,
and–a water-lily floating–Frederichsborg I have seen.
And yet these castles are shadows, lovely they were and
are,
but all their man-made beauty fades by the light of the
star,
that struck through the stems of the fir-trees—the evening
star, the pale
cool-throated star, that rises with the Danish nightingale.

THE FLORAL BANDIT

Beyond the town—oh, far! beyond it
she walks—that lady—have you seen her?
that thief of spring, that floral bandit
who leaves the grass she walks on greener.

And she can sing—the blackbirds hear her
—those little coals with throats of flame—
and they can find, alighting near her,
no sweeter practice than her name.

What is her name? Oh, ask the linnet,
for human tongue would strive in vain
to speak the buds uncrumpling in it,
and the small language of the rain.

Who is this lady? What is she?
the Sylvia all our swains adore?
Yes, she is that—unchangingly,
but she is also something more.

For buds at best are little green
keys on an old thin clavichord,
that only has the one high tune
that, since the first, all springs have heard.

And all first love with the same sighing
tunes, though more sweetly touched, has lingered,
as though he were for ever trying
toccatas Purcell might have fingered.

But no one knows her range, nor can
guess half the phrases of her fiddle,
the lady who for every man
breaks off her music in the middle.

SI LE ROI

I'LL fall asleep some day, and, waking, find
that I'm alone in the far future. Men
strange as a dream in someone else's mind
will look at me, and laugh, and pass again.

And women, bringing home their beauty's sheaves
across bright centuries, will smilingly
offer, of all those summers, a few pale leaves
of laurel dead, and so be done with me.

Coldly as marble, pure as Verd Antique,
I'll gleam, from all of those as far removed
as gleams to me some strange and carvèd Greek
boy that was lovely, and Nai Zeu! how loved.

But I'll hold out my hands as he did not,
and say, "I was a man. Are you still men?
Have you the spring still? Are your hearts still hot
with love and song? Then listen to song again!"

Listen! this is the song of primroses
with just a touch of their own fugitive yellow,
and this was how our harebells trembled, this
the slanted wing of the returning swallow.

Listen! there was a girl Persephone
was lost in Hell. Does she not haunt you still?
And Hell that trapped her body set her soul free,
each spring, to net the sun—a daffodil!

Listen (I'll say) this was a song we knew:
If I must choose, then I will choose my pretty,
if the King Louis bids me twixt these two
decide, my love and Paris his great city.

For I will love my love "(how is't with you
would you choose your great city or your maid,
and if your maid are you not lovers too,
and have you other songs than those we had?)"

And though they will not hear, because of me
the wind about some girl will sweetlier stir,
and he who loves her find, unknowingly,
the songs I sung, the love I had in her.

A CHORISTER IN AVALON

When in the glass I see the heavy clay
of which I am compact, I also see
a tall companion at my shoulder sway—
the golden ghost a god designed for me.

He is all fire, as I am smouldering ash,
he is all freedom, as I am straitly bound,
he is all spirit, I the sullen flesh,
the body of Christ is he, and I the wound.

He does not rebuke, he does not pity me,
for I am only the shadow he has cast
in another star, where earth is a memory
of something small and dark that ends at last.

It is the true star, rising in the hush
of a heaven that is wholly in the mind,
but passes out beyond it, as the thrush,
perfectly singing, leaves all thought behind.

To that star-music all our song is speaking,
to that nobility our saints forlorn,
and all our dreams no more than a sickle breaking
in our hand, and all about us is the corn.

Yet with the harvest orb the silver ear
of the young moon is common in one growth,
so, if this earth be shadow to that star,
the single thought of beauty needs them both.

And builds with both, as surely as the arc
of the moon's circle is the undrawn string,
as surely as the first note of the lark
has all the substance of an English spring.

And thus to me may cleave the golden ghost,
as I to him, in the thought pointing on
to where, beyond us both, the poet lost
on earth has found his bays in Avalon.

THE BIRCH

Ann, my daughter, finds a church
in the heart of every birch,
and the net of silver doth
serve her for an altar-cloth.

There no doubt are golden trees
in the lost Hesperides,
where the great sun when he dapples
leaves with gold finds golden apples.

And young love, as Shakespeare knows,
still is climbing after those,
while beneath the little grasses
burn and wither as love passes.

But wild love has never yet
stormed the silver parapet
of the guarded birch—the slim
lady, that will none of him.

Gold is mortal, gold will crumble,
love and golden apples tumble,
but a child's heart lends her tree
silver immortality.

ASTRONOMY

THEY sail, they sail—those lighted ships,
star-schooners out and on.
Cold eddy of the last thought slips
smooth at their keel, and is gone. . . .

Proud they come down on winds, unspiced
with aught but the cold scent
of space, to keep (who knows?) what tryst
beyond the firmament?

The ultimate spume of light will toss
upon their sails, and fall
—pearl-spray—to leave dark sheets, that cross
seas with no light at all.

Ghost-craft they steal how far, how far,
in what black foam, with stem
plunging in the wine-dark seas, that are
the years that plunge with them.

On, on they steer, span after span,
and only find to lose,
what seemed the star Aldebaran
in the shadow of Betelgeuse.

On still, and time—a bowstring—drawn
with a deep sigh must break,
and sink with scattered dark and dawn
soundlessly in their wake.

On still, and out, and space will drop
back, back, and the dark host
anchor where thought itself must stop—
but beyond thought drives the ghost.

JOURNEY'S END

WHAT will they give me, when journey's done?
Your own room to be quiet in, Son!

Who shares it with me? There is none
shares that cool dormitory, Son!

Who turns the sheets? There is but one,
and no one needs to turn it, Son!

Who lights the candle? Everyone
sleeps without candle all night, Son!

Who calls me after sleeping? Son!
You are not called when journey's done.

THE BULL-FIDDLE

WHEN music's soft rage dies,
and hushed is the movèd air,
then the heart in quiet cries
of the pale musicianer,
who was seeking by the cool
water, where truth's dark well is,
in vain her beautiful
fugitive water-lilies.
For these glimmer beyond;
and only the player guesses
how always out of his hand
fade their secret graces.
Yes! his playing is at most,
even when the bull-fiddle forgets
the wood and is free, a ghost
of the music that floats,
a fugitive water-blossom,
where no ripples stir
the cool sequestered bosom
of the pale musicianer.

THE CHEST

One day, leaning over the chest
in the musk-scented dark of my mind,
my fingers, trembling, at last
will learn there's no treasure to find.
When the god, who moves in the dusk,
has emptied the secret cache,
and even the scent of the musk
has quietly faded, I'll wish
not for the day, when lanterns
I had not kindled lit
a secret life, that the sun turns
to stone with white dust on it,
nor for the whispered token
that opened a hidden door
on a moor where gorse and bracken
bloomed, and there was no moor.
I shall not wish nor wonder
when cold, serene, august
the daylight lays my slender
victories in the dust.
For though I shall be blind then,
and nothing for me will happen,
others of my own kind then
will be throwing my windows open
on stranger lights than my lights,
to tunes I left unspoken,
and watch through lovelier twilights
stars, that I knew not, beckon.

PERSEPHONE

COME back, Persephone!
As a moonflake thin,
flutes for the dancers
you danced with begin.

Leave the deep hellebore
the dark, the untranquil
for spring's pale primrose
and her first jonquil.

Again they are singing
(oh, will you not heed them?)
with none now to answer,
and none to lead them.

They will grow older,
till comes a day
when the last of your maidens
is tired of play:

when the song as it rises
faints and droops over,
and your playmates go seeking
a gentler lover.

Listen, the dancers!
The flutes, oh, listen!
Hasten, Persephone!
Persephone! Hasten!

THE THRUSH

DEAD? with the winter behind her—
Dead? with that thrush in the tree—
Let me go in. I shall find her
just as she used to be

A finger lifted in warning
to her lips, that whisper, "Hush,"
and, clear in the April morning,
the voice of the singing thrush.

Draw up the curtain that snatches
the sunshine, and let her see
the blossoms spurting, like matches,
into flame on her almond-tree.

Dead? But she has in her bosom
the key that unlocks the spring,
and without her could almond blossom?
and how could the thrushes sing?

BETELGEUSE

On Betelgeuse
the gold leaves hang in golden aisles
for twice a hundred million miles,
and twice a hundred million years
they golden hang, and nothing stirs,
on Betelgeuse.

Space is a wind that does
not blow on Betelgeuse,
and time—oh, time—is a bird,
whose wings have never stirred
the golden avenues
of leaves on Betelgeuse.

On Betelgeuse
there is nothing that joys or grieves
the unstirred multitude of leaves,
nor ghost of evil or good
haunts the gold multitude
on Betelgeuse.

And birth they do not use
nor death on Betelgeuse,
and the God, of whom we are
infinite dust, is there
a single leaf of those
gold leaves on Betelgeuse.

THE THOUGHT

I WILL not write a poem for you,
because a poem, even the loveliest,
can only do what words can do—
stir the air, and dwindle, and be at rest.

Nor will I hold you with my hands, because
the bones of my hands on yours would press,
and you'd say after, "Mortal was,
and crumbling, that lover's tenderness."

But I will hold you in a thought without moving
spirit or desire or will—
For I know no other way of loving,
that endures when the heart is still.

THE GARDEN IMAGES

Flake by flake fallen,
snow of the hawthorn trees
you trouble the sullen
smooth garden-images.

Your witchcraft idle
accosts, enchantress,
in vain, with bridal
blossom the Huntress.

Masker with fleur-de-lys,
you entice the Italian
God of the Boundaries,
in vain, to Cotillôn.

And, in vain, the frozen note
of a falling petal
touches Love's quiet throat,
and his mouth of metal.

Drifting, bubble by bubble,
foam of the hawthorn trees,
why do you trouble
the garden images?

THE BRONZE FRIEZE

On some spring day, when, softly curled,
her sisters sleep, from under warm
brown wings a single thrush may storm
the sleepy ramparts of the world,

and the still shapes of life, first stumbling,
then shattered in the one release
of beauty, will gather into peace,
softly, like coloured clouds assembling,

remaking the dead world, as once
the souls that made a living world,
as the first screaming bugle snarled,
were stricken into groups of bronze:

and the world's youth was one of them,
a vast unchanging fresco of
Crusaders who can never move
on, nor forget Jerusalem,

believing that to life reveille
called, that but called to bridal death,
who, at the world's end, trod a path
strewn to her knees with youth's one lily.

All metal-cold they gleam, all breathless
under that slow-transfixing rain
against bronze skies the brazen slain,
in their long gesture of dying, deathless.

So strange the world with bronze was stricken;
  and yet through that bewitchèd hush
  the single accent of a thrush
who knows, who knows it may not quicken,

not those to bronze transmuted, but
  all those about whose living knees
  creep day by day stone silences
till almost in stone the heart is shut.

So might they wake, between the spears,
  as with another poet's kiss
  the princess who, for want of this,
lay sleeping for a hundred years.

Nor she alone, but king and queen,
  wakened, men spoke, girls laughed and she
  walked with her lover gracefully
as though the years had never been.

THE GOD CUPIDON

UNDER what trees
dost thou walk fair
between memories
and as on air?

What shadows pursue thee
binding thy lightness,
when we would renew thee
in thy first brightness,

ere thought could parch
thy silver lissom
grace of the birch,
or of chestnut blossom?

What doth befall thee
in the avenues
where is none to call thee
as we did use?

Who in that soft
half-world of branches,
where no winds lift,
nor the moon blanches,

deep from the heart
thy name has cried on,
pale boy that wert
the god Cupidon?

(I) DRAGON-FLY BEAUTY

SCARCELY a whisper from this Southern sea,
and in our orange-trees the gold fruits glimmer,
as in your heart the golden thoughts of me,
as in my heart your beauty's golden summer.

And see! the scent in your moon-misted hair
has drawn the dancing fire-flies, and they
leave, as they spin, so heavy is the air,
a spiral wake behind them of gold spray.

So heavy is the air that from the strand
the voice of that boy singing hangs and lingers,
as you could take the music in your hand
and drop it, note by note, between your fingers.

What is the song? Oh, do not ask. But listen!
how through the words, with never a stir of wings,
love in the South that does not need to hasten
but has the whole warm night to dream in, sings:

Dancingly in the South
the weaving fire-flies,
and your mouth against my mouth,
and in your eyes
almost too deep for seeing,
or to dream of
the gold wings fleeing
of fire-fly love.
I have hidden my eyes
with your corn-coloured hair,

but the fire-flies
have stolen there,
and colour is all
and light and scent
in the magical
dark firmament,
where in your eyes
of fire-fly love
the clear stars rise,
and do not move.

(II) MOTH-BEAUTY

Gold days! leave us one day!
  Silver nights! the deep
peace of a cool Sunday
  when the bells sleep,

and no organ-quiver
  moves the still air,
but peace is for ever
  everywhere.

No sound, no splendour,
  nor heart's sweet riot;
but only the slender
  fingers of quiet,—

in the autumn weather
  on the fevered brow
cool, and together
  I and thou!

THE WHITE DRESS

Some evening when you are sitting alone,
by your high window, motionless, and white—
I shall come, by the way that none but I have known,
into the quiet room out of the night.

You will know I have come, without turning your head
because of the way the air will lie quite still,
as though it waited for something to be said
that no man has ever said, and no man will.

But you will be wiser than the air. You know
that for the thing we feel there is no word—
and you will not move even when I turn to go,
even when the sound of my footsteps is no longer heard.

MUSICIANERS

O YEARS that left my love,
before she knew me,
do you complain
that you are hers no longer?
And do you wheel
on cold and desolate wings,
crying against the stranger
who shuts you out?
O jealous poets,
I can hear your Aprils
singing in her least word,
and all your Junes
are in the shape of her mouth
—midsummer days, midsummer days—
and in her eyes all those midsummer eves!
Then fold your wings, oh, jealous,
and cease from crying.
She is your poem, musicianers,
as I am hers.

THE FIDDLE AND THE BOW

THIS is what the fiddle said to the bow:
"No! oh no!
You should have warned me before the touch
of music, that it hurt too much.

You should have warned me, you should have told me,
before you let the music hold me,
how this poor wood were fain to melt
into the beauty it has felt.

How for one breathless note it trembles
almost on the edge of flame, then tumbles,
wounded with the sense of mortal things,
down, down, down, down with broken wings.

It was not right to wound and wake me.
Give me my silence back, or take me
wholly, and never let me go."
This is what the fiddle said to the bow.

But the bow said, "How shall I guess
what bids me answer, 'Yes! oh yes!'
Since a greater thing than we are thus
for its blind purpose useth us?

We did not choose our way of making,
not sleeping ours to choose, nor waking,
not ours the starry stroke of sound
to choose or fly, though ours the wound.

Though dead wood cry, 'How shall I dare it?'
and wood reply, 'I cannot bear it,'
Yet his alone to choose, whose fingers
takes the dead wood, and makes his singers.

And if of dust he shapes this brittle
lift of the wings, this song's one petal
that shines and dies, is it not just
to suffer for song, oh, singing dust?

His was the choice, and if he wake us
out of the wood, but will not slake us,
thus stirred with the stars, at least we know
what pain the Stars have," says the bow.

ENDYMION

THEN I'll say this—life is so still
without your love, that when I wake,
at night, I hear over the hill
(you know my hill) the moon's heart break.

She's dreaming of her shepherd lover—
Ah, skyey wanton! he is gone
this thousand years, and love is over
for us and for Endymion.

DIE EINSAME TRÄNE

And, if you weep, of your
bright tears keep one to shed
when there's no pain to endure,
and love's last word is said.

For then you will not weep,
but read, all tearless, writ
of pain that fell on a sleep,
and of love that died with it.

"And died love so?" you'll wonder
"and what of him that wrote,"
when from the page a slender
melody will float,

charming you with a dim
memory of all
your beauty was to him—
and then that tear may fall.

THE DANCE

First the trees curtseyed in high cotillion
with green mantillas like tall Spanish ladies,
and the wind played for them the Andalusian
air of "Green twilights in murmurous Cadiz."
To the ball-room windows, his fear dissembling,
Pierrot—the moon—steals from without,
throws his silver pebble, listens trembling,
and glides into darkness, cold as a trout.

THINGS LOVELIER

You cannot dream
  Things lovelier
Than the first love
  I had of her.

Nor air is any
  As magic shaken
As her breath in
  The first kiss taken.

And who, in dreaming,
  Understands
Her hands stretched like
  A blind man's hands?

Open, trembling,
  Wise they were—
You cannot dream
  Things lovelier.

THE COLD FAIRY-KINGS

If you must fail in doing still, heart, hold on!
Others and nobler thus failed, who thought the quest
sufficed, and were proud. And their souls lightly rest
among the tossing conquerors. They are one
with the cold fairy-kings of Babylon,
whose kingdom is that country in a mist
where wheeling dawns do not, though amethyst,
change them, where white they brood on their white
throne.
Beyond colour, as beyond action, heart, the kings
are the source of ecstasy. And, though they rule
nothing but the beat of their heart, out of their cool
thought in the quiet the event they seek not springs.
None troubles with praise, none knows their regencies—
Are you too proud to be lonely, heart, with these?

LOVE AND PETER

Love stood at the gates of heaven,
unhouselled and unshriven,
but sweet—dear God!—how sweeter
than all the saints, thought Peter.

"Love," sighed the saint, "sweet ghost,
if I let you in, I am lost."
"Peter," love said, "did you doubt
that I came to let you out?"

MONNETIER MAIRIE

—And the great massif floated in the sun,
a silver island in a golden ocean,
that hardly stirs till, sudden as a gun,
with one great wave it flashes into motion.
Nor did they speak, but trancèd watched, as one
who in some wood has drunk a fairy potion,
and the great trees stretch up to heaven, or stun
the mind with green beyond all human notion.
Half a life long with all her capes and beaches
that argent island drifted in a trance,
and with it drifted hope, and perfect joy,
and love, that stains the very stars it reaches,
until at last the sun went down on France,
and night walked on the mountains of Savoy.

THE END

When the house of the heart is empty,
and the thin dust,
like snow, begins to settle:
and, red as rust,

the sun comes in by the window
at the broken pane,
till night with her blackened dishcloth
stops it up again.

Then up the carpetless staircase
drag their slippered feet
the dead days, and the dead desires—
shuffle and pass and meet.

Downstairs in the cellar the darkness
is deep enough to swim in,
and, there, washing back and forwards
are pale men, and pale drowned women.

The friends no longer quarrel,
the lovers do not kiss—
and one day, or the other day
all houses come to this.

A LILY AT LES INVALIDES

MAY 5TH, 1921

WHAT need is there of song or emphasis?
He was concerned with glory and put it by.
His name was rumoured in the dark crannies
of the heart, and he is dead a century.

It is not to have been great that matters—
but to have used his greatness for darkening
beauty with war and death—these are the tatters
of the scarecrow, that an idiot labelled " King."

He has gone back to earth, at which he scraped
a little, and the deep earth in her bosom
had room for him, as for all dust, and shaped
out of Napoleon (who knows?) this blossom.

DELIGHT

WHY! she was called " Delight " and we, who knew her
walked on her ways barefooted in the grass.
We felt the living flowers grow; and through her
were friendly with the herb, as Adam was.
We have been in the thickets. We have heard
leaves sigh together deeply, turning over,
as any child in sleeping. And a bird
tranquilly called, as Eve had called, her lover.
She has passed by, we think, though being slender,
has left no print, but all the wood is new—
laden with her, O more than royal spender!
how lately and how richly she passed through!
And the air is sweet still, as it trembled round her:
we shall not come again till we have found her.

TORCHBEARER

I saw your hands lying at peace
at last, and I thought of Helen's hands
that were not lovelier than these,
yet live in all men's minds.
And I thought " beauty is not trapped
even in this delicate
dust, these hands, but was shaped
elsewhere inviolate."
And I thought " there is one mould
and these hands, in beauty set,
pass the torch, lit from of old,
to hands that are not yet."
Therefore I do not bid farewell,
torchbearer! for you belong
now to the imperishable
foundation of song.

PLAY! VIOLINS

Just before love begins
far off the lovers hear,
plucked as on violins
as sweet, but ghostlier,

in the silences
of the heart beating,
the sigh of the first kiss
with the last kiss meeting.

Never again will these
know in a single breath
passion at one with peace,
life one with death.

Never again on bowed head
the chrism beyond price,
of possession will be made
holy with sacrifice.

But love is not always thus.
(Play violins!
faint as you play for us
just before love begins).

THE MOONLIGHT SONATA

I HAVE had great gifts—the cool clear brow of a queen
that for a moment was mine to crown from afar,
hands for a moment outstretched for mine to rest between,
as in the hands of his love the hands of the lover are.

Well! she has tired of the crown. Do you think I shall blame her?
She has folded her hands together. Shall I protest?
She has only done those things that well became her
at the time and in the way that they became her best.

What more should I ask of life than thus to have shared
Beethoven's thrill, when, waking from a swoon, light
flooded his mind, and he found on the sheet prepared
a hand had written the final chords of "The Moonlight"?

He did not say to the music, "Why did you desert me?
You were mine and are mine no longer. It is over."
And I, when I wake, shall I complain that she hurt me
who is now for no man, but for all men, the lover?

For like the Sonata she has passed out of my mind
in loveliness completed, and though I cannot mould her
with the master's stroke in music's eternal kind,
I shall hold her for ever, because I did not hold her.

She is a queen in the moment of crowning transfigured,
a lover in the hushed instant when the first kiss assuages
the heart's long trouble, and how shall my heart be beggared
now that my love with her beauty belongs to the ages?

THE FIRST HARP-PLAYER

It will not matter,
Says the first harp-player,
What string I pluck, I
Shall not waken her.

For she is tired of music,
Since the grey musician
Played his cold rebeck for her
As only he can.

Break, like spent bubbles,
My notes! Shatter and tumble!
She was light, she was swift, she was lovely,
And now she must crumble.

BEAMSLEY BEACON

FROM Darley Street to Beamsley Beacon
there's a boy walking fathoms deep.
It's daylight, sonny! Won't you waken?
But the boy walks fast asleep.

It's not Darley Street he's walking in,
but another street he trod on,
through the sprawling town of Bradford, when
'twas a street you might meet God on,

coming to town with an easy smile,
like a wool manufacturer,
but the boy would know Him at half a mile,
and nobody else would I'll swear.

(For when you're young you can get close
to God, as a straw in a stack;
and if the boy's with Him, do you suppose
that Darley Street will see him back?)

But stepping out past Hollings Hill,
Esholt, and Menston, and Burley,
would the poor oaf be sleeping still?
Oh, he'd be waking surely!

For the great green moors come down to graze
like a herd of cows to the Wharfe,
and you can lay your cheek, if you please,
anywhere, on smooth turf.

Won't he wake? With the lapwing wheeling
by the Ilkley moors? But mebbe
there's bells, we can't hear, he hears knelling,
far off, at Bolton Abbey.

Aye! there's the Abbey, and high above it
the mitre of the Beacon!
Listen! poor lad, you used to love it!
But No! he will not waken.

For he walks where bracken does not wither,
where winter is yet to find,
and the cold dry scent of the Bolton heather
is a thought in a poet's mind.

Till he plucks a rose—oh, look! he has laid it
to his mouth, as though he cried:
"This was my youth, and I betrayed it."
And his eyes are open wide.

YASMIN

Not for your beauty, though it were a dower
for fifty ladies, nor because you move
the air about you with the stroke of a flower,
nor for the way your hands are pale, I love.

Nor the high movement of your spirit only
I love,—white ship with sails when wind blows after,
nor yet your populous mind, nor yet the lonely
space of the dreams you modify with laughter.

Others (their lovers say) had these—but I,
loving all these, most love that you will take
nothing I bring, though wanting it you die,
save what I bring you for my own heart's sake.

THE LIST

THERE's a castle over the seven
hills and the seven seas,
half way between Jesus in heaven,
and the ringing gods of Greece.

And, east of the moon, the towers
watch a star in Bethlehem,
and, west of the sun, the flowers
in Tempe beckon to them.

But east, far east, of the Manger,
and west, far west, of Parnassus
we shall each give our heart to a stranger—
strange lads among stranger lasses.

I shall no longer wander
your goose-boy—for I shall be
with the Greek, with the young Alexander
when he rides to Galilee.

And you will change as the way is
from the girl I knew to a Queen—
Flora the Roman, or Thaïs
or Mary the Magdalene.

Thus we'll count over together
the list of all beautiful things—
but I'll keep my grey goose-feather
for the day when you're tired of kings.

THE CHANGING SPIRIT OF MAN

What changes? Not beauty nor love,
for not in Time is that
these two are fashioned of,
nor liable to Fate.

As crocuses in Alpine meadows
with their own flame all night
burn, so these two in the heart's shadows
shine with no borrowed light.

For these are absolute, that seek not
new lovers to thrill or fret,
having all those who loved and speak not,
and those who are not yet.

Yes! love and beauty do not need Time,
nor need our praise or tears;
they are the harvest in the seed-time,
the snow between the ears,

knowing no seasons, with a dim rose
they haunt an April noon,
and with the all-but-scentless primrose
temper the sweets of June.

Or when the poet hears the thin
high tune begin to shake,
ere the loveliness has entered in
he hardly dares to make,

already these have spoken the end,
and in the shaping mind
the part that he will reach to blend
with the whole he will not find.

And in the first kiss, cold far-off
clings the last kiss, through which
these two have made our mortal love
with things immortal rich.

For thus these two, our selves estranging
from our brief vision, can
kindle for a flash with the unchanging
the changing spirit of man.

LAZARUS

I've left off the cynic's cap and bells,
and begun to believe in miracles
since the story of Christ and Lazarus
happened to me and my mistress thus.

I needn't describe her. Who has not seen
once in his life the face that I mean—
hair—was there ever hair so lit
with stars and the wild eyes under it,
lips—but the lips are veiled with the mist
of a million kisses—unkist, unkist,
and the hands have waited a whole life through
cool, inaccessible, empty—for you,
hair, eyes, lips, hands and the something over
that takes a woman and makes a lover.
My girl had all this, and her own sweet trick
of moving her hands half a shade too quick
for her tongue, as though, ere the words could start,
the blood had gone to them straight from the heart.
I once saw Kubelik draw in his net
from the seas of silence, with sounds still wet,
as they shot the breakers, and climbed, and shone,
translucently silver, but he drew on,
slowly so slowly, the bow pressed on string,
as though in his blood some dangerous thing
stirred, wilder than music, from waters where,
all day long in the darkness, gold hair
lies motionless, gold on green, and a fear
struck to his heart of that motionless hair,

if once it should move, and clear in the middle
of the last great movement he laid down his fiddle.
So you, so I, with the chosen woman
before the first kiss—ah, she is human,
blood as our blood is, and flesh made for pain,
and the mortal clasp, but not then! not then!
For something immortal goes out, and thus
in that moment we die like Lazarus.
The immortal in her, the immortal in me
sink like a stone, and the enormous sea
has never a bubble to mark the place,
where the cold gold hair lies motionless.

When Lazarus woke in the air one said,
"How is it down in the dark with the dead?"
But Lazarus plucked a grass from the clean
earth, and sobbed on one great breath, "Green,"
and holding it close as a gem unpriced
fell with no word in the bosom of Christ.
And I came back from the dark of love,
and all day long watched the willows move
their leaves in the sun, and above me I heard
for the first time the first song of a bird.

If I'd had those strings and the fiddle stick,
I'd have finished the movement, Kubelik.

THIEVES OF MERCY

"WHO is the first thief?" "I am the first thief.
I stole the fear of beauty and of women.
There's none goes terrified of loveliness,
and the way a woman moves across a room
easily as the wind moves, but all night
the sound of her skirt is rustling in your heart.
I stole all that,—and no one says good-bye
to boyhood any longer on her lips,
where boyhood breasts the tape of life, and breaks
the tape on a sob. And no one says good-bye
any longer to love—and so goes down the hill,
but beyond the hill are all the lights of the world."
"This is the first mercy," said the first thief.
"I stole the fear of beauty and of women."

But the lovers stood about him, and they cried:
"This is no thief of ours. Let him be crucified."

"Who is the second thief?" "I am the second.
I stole the fear of childhood and of children.
There's none need fear a little leisured voice
beating the bird for gay monotony,
with usual sounds all crunched and daily words
wearing the fancy dress of a babe's mouth,
that sets them dancing. Then the violins
were hidden in the tumbling of their feet—
but these are quiet and there's no one hears
the tunes they made in walking, or the sound
you hear when they are grown, and they are gone,

and you are sitting lonely by the hearth."
" This is the second mercy," said the second.
" I stole the fear of childhood and of children."

But the mothers stood about him, and they cried:
" This is no thief of ours. Let him be crucified."

" Who is the third thief? " " I am the third thief.
I stole the fear of ending and of death.
There's none need fear the quiet with one slow sound
(not for their ears) of the grass drawn by the rain,
and the softer sun, into the air. They sleep,
and all the pain of loving, and being loved,
and all the pain of hating, and being hated,
and all the pain of neither loving nor hating
are done, all done, and they are done with it.
Poor life goes on, and other men and women
hold out their hands, and cry to one another.
But I have stolen the quiet, and no one's sleeping
where hands are shut, and there's no sound of crying.

This is the third mercy," said the third thief.
" I stole the fear of ending, and of death."

But all mankind stood round him, and they cried:
" Give us Barabbas. Let him be crucified."

LOVE IN JEOPARDY

HERE by the rose-tree
they planted once
of Love in Jeopardy
an Italian bronze.

Not love the conqueror,
not love with wings,
but a boy waiting for
perilous things:

his bow unstrung,
unsounded the zither,
and the delicate young
hands clasped together,

as grave as the first
boy with the first maiden,
outside of the curst
closed gates of Eden.

But they have ravished
away this love,
and he is not cherished
nor spoken of,

save, whenas fluted
from Eden, blows
for two the transmuted
phrase of the rose,

thorn-note, blossom-note,
note of the petal,
cool as the rain, but
trembling a little

as though, brought hither
from far, one sung
to a mute zither,
with bow unstrung,

how by a rose-tree
they planted once
of Love in Jeopardy
an Italian bronze.

PRIMROSES

WHY No! It is not thus,
romantic and high,
that the youth in us,
and our loves, go by.

These eyes saw yesterday,
hunched in a London street,
a flower-seller (O gai!)
with broken boots to her feet,

black bonnet perched askew
on straggled grey curl,
and I thought of you,
that day, when a girl

held out primroses
—all spring for a penny—
and you cried, "Buy me this!"
but I wouldn't buy any.

"They'll die," I said, "they'll die."
'Twas the first of our crosses.
And now I can't buy
for you primroses.

All that I have of you
is that old girl mumbling
(black bonnet askew,
and chapped hands trembling):

"Buy a bunch, kind sir."
And a ghost passed by,
as I answered her,
"No! primroses die."

TWO WORLDS

For at the last when we have counted and weighed
the long day's service, now that night's breaking,
"I loved," you'll say, and I shall answer, "I made,"
but which will be more then, my dear, the loving or
making?

You were and that was enough. For merely by being
you were rich, and enriched, as a rose, that will ask
nothing, but is bright alone; while I was fleeing
from my self in a cloak of dream and song's silver mask.

History was in your profound quiet. Deep peace
after the old wars you harboured. What men strove for
was in your even blood, and the tranquil courtesies
of your guarded thoughts were what these spent their
love for.

As in the end all adventure is in the mind,
and the whole East flashes and fades in the thought
of the fakir by the roadside, white eyeballs blind,
moulding the universe, because he is seeing naught.

So in your heart too, Troy rose and shattered,
faiths climbed and foundered, thrones loved and hated,
and you smiled in silence, since nothing mattered,
it would end in dust as it started—and you waited.

But I was not content. "I will make a world," I said,
"with two rhymed words," and in glory I moved,
God in His Garden walking. But you bowed your head
over the daily work of your hands, and you loved.

My world had no roots in the past: it was a bubble
catching pale lights from a colder moon than our moon;
it was the fiddler's note, yes, the last high treble,
that is almost too sweet to hear at the end of the tune.

I made a world. You suffered a world to make
its own blind self, and now as the two worlds drift
out into the dark together, into the silent wake
of all the lost worlds, answer! Whose was the greater
gift?

THE SHEETED LIVING

LEAVE the dead to bury their dead!
I'll keep my grieving
for the cold, unburièd,
but sheeted living.

Ghosts they wander by street and mart,
and that one says to this one:
"Oh, had I never had a heart
I should not now so miss one."

But this one says, "O brother, brother,
when once your heart is lost,
at least you cannot break another,
and that is something, ghost."

THE SON OF MAN

They sang to the new world, "We know
nothing save this, to fight is not enough,
to love is not enough, and least of all
to win. For there is something lies beyond
action, and the mere rumble of a planet
scuttering like a coney round the sun."

They sang to the new world, "Like us
you will follow the dream to find it false,
you will have your faiths, and they will shatter,
you will love and wish your love had never been,
and you will cry, poor midges of the second
in the brief attribute of death, 'How long!'"

They sang to the new world, "And still
though God were only a phantom in the mist,
pray to him, and it may be of your prayers
of all your prayers the phantom God may clothe
himself in your dream's unsubstantial flesh,
and walk with you as a man walks with his friend."

They sang to the new world, "For thus
reality is the servant of the dream,
and as all beauty is in the beholder's eye,
all music in the swift creating ear,
so, Sons of Men, with your long dreams you can
not only fashion, but be the Son of Man."

IN THE STREET OF LOST TIME

Rest and have ease;
here are no more voyages;
fold, fold your narrow, pale
hands; and under the veil
of night lie, as I have seen you lie
in your deep hair; but patiently
now that new loves, new days,
have gone their ways.

THE RESURRECTION

MARY the Magdalen
is risen again, is risen again . . .
Between the rock-rose and shallow
cup of the mallow,
in the adorable faint
scent of cold blossom, the saint
prays with his lips to the grass:
" Let my cup pass! "

" Leave praying, James! Leave praying, Peter! "
" What do you know, veiled girl, of our prayer? "
The rock-roses quiver, the mallows stir.
" Life," she whispers, between their eyes,
(Lies! adorable lies!)
" Life is sweeter! "
" There is no life," Peter saith,
" since He went to gather
flowers in the garden of His Father,
the rose of Sharon, the fritillary
as frayed, as delicate, as tender as Mary,
and till these are gathered there is death."

" There is no life," James the Saint saith.
" He has taken life to wear
death's cold and noble air.
Do you pass,
veiled girl, softly through the grass.
and leave us with death! "

" Love is risen again,"
saith Mary the Magdalen.
" Peter and James,
listen to my sweet names!
I am the Resurrection and the Death! "
Mary the Magdalen saith.

JUPITER

BEFORE men gloomed on earth the flame-gods were
lanterns in slowly-swinging Jupiter;
orange and new-cut emerald they broke
the flags unfurled of light with one gold stroke.
(We
who are bound to death by gravity,
and must
obey the prone direction of the dust,
far
in the dream, in which we move and are,
remember
colours no eye has seen, no tongue can number.)

If a great rose flung off her sad attire
of infinite flesh, and blossomed into fire,
so she were they, and they the shape of her,
those flames rose-lovely lit in Jupiter.
(Yes—
their breath is loveliness,
and this
is all their business.
Flame
into their world they came,
and fire
world without end aspire.)

Knowledge for them is only light returning
upon herself of fire burning, burning,
and love the colours that will be, are and were
(how shall one tell their name?) in Jupiter.

(Light
Chrome, Jasper, Malachite
or spun
lotus–vermilion–
These
are their natural presences,
and thus
Jupiter with gods is populous.)

ANY MODERN POET TO HIS MUSE

I HAVE made you these,
because the love that I had
was not enough it seems,
and your heart sees
that even they are afraid
that they do not fill your dreams.

Your dreams—they are so cool,
and my poems are not cool at all,
for though their flame be thin, it is pure fire,
but they shall be brought to school
to learn how love may be folded like a shawl,
and how in lavender laid by desire.

And when the great poets of love
cry on them: "Nay, but tush
if this be the new way of passion!"
my poems and I will not move,
but will answer without a blush:
"Not ours, but hers we followed, is the fashion."

THE LOCRI FAUN

Dedicated, without his knowledge or consent, to the author of "South Wind" by his devoted admirer "Mr. W."

WINGS? Not wings, but his slim shoulder
lacking them (you say) is colder
than long since when one of us
(was it you, Theocritus?)
found the air with wings aflame
at the whisper of his name?

Wings? He had no need of wings,
whose enchanted whisperings
overtook the flying bird,
that hung in the air, and never stirred
till the reed, dying, set her free
from the burden of immortality.

Wings? not wings! Reply for us
since you can, Theocritus!
Other gods perhaps with these
cheat the mutinous centuries—
heavy fly-winged shapes of Bel,
Lucifer the archangel.
These may need wings their hate to cover,
not He—the universal lover.

Would you have him change who is
changeless down the centuries—
youngest of all things old, and sung
oldest for ever of all things young?

Let him stand in every cool
garden, straight and beautiful,
poised for passage, as he stood
in a lost Sicilian wood,
whose fair trees, long dead, bloom after
death in his immortal laughter.
Let him stand a moment thus
in the heart of all of us
a boy, whose reed is not less tender
than our own youth that must surrender
its fierce sweet heart, the grace of limb
that are inviolate in him.

Wings not wings, but with the dawn
still about him steps the Faun,
as Priapus to the tryst
that ancient beauty kept with Christ—
He is neither more nor less
than the desire of loveliness,
and the beating up to it, and the swift
intolerable lovely lift
of the wingless heart that springs
up, out, and on, and needs no wings.

Athens, Rome and Bethlehem,
he is all and more than them.

Pheidias, you carved his curls,
that robbed the pale Athenian girls
of worship,—hyacinthine hair.
Oh, they were fair, but he was fair
with the sculptor's difference,
that moulds to something more than sense
boy's melting beauty in the glass
held up to him by Pheidias—

Surely some rose-crowned night—oh, some
moon–mad love–mad symposium
the pale boy Alcibiades
slipped the tunic from his knees,
and stood with outstretched arms, his bare
beauty all white, save that the hair
unchapleted, than gold far golder,
lay all along one silver shoulder—
and there was a sound of leaves that brush
together in the noon-day hush,
and no wind lifts them, and in the place
of the white boy a whiter grace,
a stricter beauty, and the grave
line that no mortal lovers have—
the strange slant eyes, the feet that made
marble they stepped on green as jade,
cold, pure, mysterious, withdrawn,
for boy too fair, too faint for Faun—
and thus you saw, all dim with trees,
and carved your Alcibiades.

Wings not wings—he came your way
with the sparrow, Lesbia!
Curved lips for song, the little cruel
teeth hid behind, and song the jewel
not a white stone, but what is called
by us at least the emerald—
Nay, do not be ashamed to say—
you feared your poet—Lesbia!
You feared the secret sense of dim
flowers burgeoning in him,
you feared what eyes have never seen
the green too green to be a green,
you feared and felt behind the kiss
other lips that were not his.

Ah, that was he—you cannot fool us
nor fooled your Lesbia, Catullus!

Catullus, Alcibiades,
and a third was both of these,
more than they and both of them
the Son of Man in Bethlehem,
Son of Man the one in three,
three in one—oh, that was he!
His the whispered tunes that were
yours, Sicilian luteplayer.
He the pure unswerving glass
held up to beauty, Pheidias.
His Catullus! is the cry
of love that dies, and does not die,
the heart's desire to find and throne
a greater beauty than her own,
the heart's desire for what will lend
to love that ends love without end,
beauty whose beauty none can prove,
and love so deep it is not love,
beauty and love that keep their tryst
with truth, and lose themselves in Christ.

Who is he? Oh, whisperer
at afternoon, oh, lazy stir
in the half-waking mind, oh, threat
of beauty? Are you hungry yet?
You should be quiet in a green bed,
for Pan is dead and Pan is dead,
who was the whisperer, and still
listen the reed beyond the hill!
the same dew-notes that should be done
in the darkness whisper on,
with what dead springs how lit, to glisten
in springs that are not yet. Oh, listen!

Speak for the herds, Theocritus!
the shepherd-boy in all of us—
this is the same, the woodland note,
the sun-warmed lips, the slim brown throat,
the luminous shepherd tending sheep
on the hushed borderlands of sleep,
the harvester whose waggons come
out of long dreams to harvest-home,
the flowers he saw and passing by
lent the flowers infinity,
the wind among the olive trees.
And those pale swans, the Pleiades,
down the calm lake of night that swim,
mount silver wings, because of him,
the shepherd god whom shepherds built
out of the hopes themselves had spilt,
out of the things they would have been
had not mortality slipped between,
and made of the crying spirit of man
their god and ours, the woodland Pan.

This was the whisper on the grass—
ah, not your music—Pheidias!
but the restless spirit of man
reaching through vision up to Pan,
made a new god, and worshipped this,
where, high on the Acropolis,
it seemed, the luteplayer had played,
and the echoes in the colonnade
had trembled a moment, and put on
the marbles of the Parthenon.

But even then—oh, whisperer!
you did not cease to call for her,
who is a god and goddess both,
the lady who is Ashtaroth.

The dazzling remedies of error
glimpsed in the Greek, the argent mirror,
even that beauty did not lull us,
nor cure desire, nor you, Catullus!
Again the note rich with the pain
that love has builded on—in vain,—
who out of the roses she has trod
takes a woman, and makes a god,
the cruellest god, the fleetingest
but, O Catullus! how far the best!

But even so the tune draws on!
when love is done, when love is done,
the tune is love, the tune the lover,
and the grass on the grave when love is over,
and, where this love is sacrificed,
the tune breaks round the feet of Christ.

The heart of man is the Creator
for ever than his own gods greater,
and even the truth that he has made
in his own image—Christ—will fade,
where gold, beyond the gold of dawn,
listen! the reed, and see! the Faun!

Let him stand in every cool
garden straight and beautiful,
secret in the heart of man,
the unassuageable shape of Pan,
who was all things, who is all things
and has no wings, and needs no wings.

ENVOI

When the spark that glittered
flakes into ash,
and the spirit unfettered
is done with flesh,

when all that wonder,
this loveliness
of heart lies under
the sleepy grass,

and slow are the swift,
and dark the fair,
and sweet voices lift
not on the air,

when the long spell
of dust lies on
all that was well
bethought upon,

of all that lovely,
of all those brief
hopes that went bravely
beyond belief,

of life's deep blazon
with love's gold stain
passing all reason
doth nought remain?

What need of answer?
bird-chaunting priest
dawn swings her censer
of bloom-white mist,

noon from her shoulder
lets her sun-shawl
half loose, half hold her,
and drifting fall,

and evening slowly
by hill and wood
perfects her holy
solitude,

unasked, undaunted
by love, or what
the heart has wanted,
and wanteth not.

Unasked? Say rather
that these will startle
to-morrow other
hearts with mortal

beauty they had
from us, as we
inherited
that legacy.

Undaunted? Yes,
since death can lend
to loveliness
only an end

that with the beginning
is one designed,
one shape, one meaning
beyond the mind.

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